

Guyana Trip Diary 2008

I am here in Guyana enjoying the sweltering heat. I cannot complain, really, because quite like the warm weather. It is great for the pores! Yesterday, I collected the boxes and barrels that I had shipped, and now my aunt's stairwell and one room are overtaken with books, school supplies, toiletries, and towels. The plan is to have them distributed within the next few days to schools, organizations, and the Georgetown Public Hospital, and to leave a few days for rest and relaxation so that I do not return to New York more tired than when I left. Although I am trying to keep my schedule light, I am fighting a losing battle.

Today I started by taking items to St. Ann's Orphanage, and to Joshua House another orphanage in Georgetown. Eight large boxes of books were collected by a representative from the National Library Georgetown. (I was very pleased that they were able to collect it because the boxes were much too heavy for me to lift. Unpacking all the items shipped, and hauling them into my aunt's home was a task in and of itself.) This Friday, I'll be speaking with fourth year medical students, and in addition to books and journals, I will be giving them four stethoscopes, and three pocket ophthalmoscopes. On Saturday, I'll be going to the Sophia Literacy Program which, by the way, is affiliated with the Rotary Club. Next Tuesday, I'll be speaking with about 180 students, ages 14 to 18, at my former high school in Guyana, St. Rose's High School. I'll also be speaking with students at Queens College, another high school in Georgetown. I have yet to schedule visits to Ptolemy Reid Rehabilitation Center, Hawkeye Sports and Mentoring Center, St. Rose's High School, Dayspring Literary Program, and the Social Women's Movement Daycare Center.

I am having a very productive visit, and it is wonderful to have internet access even though I have to go to a neighborhood internet cafe and use their service - for a slight fee, of course! I'll sign out for now, and will be in touch soon.

Wednesday, November 12

...took clothing, linen and school supplies to Ms. Stanford, founder of the Social Women Movement, which has a feeding program for children, provide food and clothing to needy women and children, and assist the underprivileged in the Charlestown, and Lodge area.

Thursday, November 13

...visited Ptolemy Reid Rehabilitation Centre, and a tutoring program in West Ruimveldt; donated supplies.

Empowerment and Equity Through Education, Inc.

Saturday, November 14

...took books and supplies to the Sophia Literacy Program.

Monday, November 17

...visited the Lifeline Counseling Center, where an educational program is in the process of being developed. This organization provides assistance to orphans and vulnerable children – those who are affected by, or infected with HIV and AIDS. Went to the University of Guyana at Turkeyne and spoke briefly with the University Librarian, and the Deputy University Librarian. (The conversation was very brief as they were in the process of organizing the re-shelving the books in the entire library. Several buildings including the Library were closed due to the removal of asbestos.)

Tuesday, November 18

...visited St. Rose's Secondary School where I engaged in a very lively two-hour discussion with students, and their many questions. One student emphasized their need for textbooks. (The donated supplies were taken before to day.) Went to Georgetown Public Hospital. Met with more medical students there and distributed textbooks, stethoscopes, ophthalmoscopes, and other items. Ten students accompanied me to the maternity ward and gave out toiletries and bath towels for mothers and infants as in previous years.

Wednesday, November 19

...again went to Ptolemy Reid Rehabilitation Centre. The children were given a snack of fresh fruit salad, pastries, and a fruit beverage. Later visited another Lifeline Counseling Centre, and distributed books and magazines.

Thursday, November 20

...gave sixty notebooks to the Communities Arise Literacy program in Sophia.

Friday, November 21

...visited Queens College and spoke with students in both Lower and Upper Sixth Forms about the application process to U.S. colleges and universities; the transition from the Guyanese culture to that of the U.S.; and tips on being a successful applicant to U.S. medical schools. All of the students are in the Science stream and many are interested in ultimately pursuing either an MD, or a Ph.D. Degree.

Saturday, November 22

...took more books to the Sophia Literacy Program, and the National Library. Met the students in the Communities Arise program. Visited the Riverview Community in Ruimveldt, a very economically depressed community where a large number of the residents are squatters. Distributed school supplies,

Empowerment and Equity Through Education, Inc.

reading books, and children and adult clothing.

- - - - -

During this trip to Guyana, I met with Fr. John Persaud a Catholic priest who described what the Catholic Church is doing in the Interior, and with Amerindian communities there. Fr. John also introduced me to two women who have started a reading program under their house in Hadfield Street, Georgetown, serving twenty-four children. I spent some time with the country coordinator for Every Child Guyana, a UK-based organization that is active in Georgetown, Linden, Agricola and other communities on the East Coast.

The need in Guyana is great. There is a shortage of textbooks, school supplies, and of teachers. There is a real need for food programs, as children who are hungry will find it hard to learn. It was a privilege for me to be able to help in some measure, and I thank all of you who by your generous support and donations made this possible.

Here is a sample of the items distributed: 500 pencils; 270 pens; 28 sharpeners; 49 rulers; 82 boxes of 24 crayons; 34 boxes of 12 colored pencils; 30 pencil boxes; 279 erasers; 390 composition and spiral notebooks; 80 glue and glue sticks; 38 children scissors; 139 folders; 43 binders; 117 highlights; 4,175 sheets of filer notepaper; and 25 protractors. Index cards, whiteout, three-hole punches, markers, paint sets; graphing paper were also distributed. Those in the hospital received 89 bars of soap; 40 large bath towels; 47 toothbrushes; 45 tubes of toothpaste; and 30 containers of baby powder. Baby bath towels, wash cloths, antibacterial soap, feminine hygiene products, shaving cream were also distributed.

I hope that together we can continue to help the children and young people of Guyana to succeed.